

Ah, But They Might Be by TheBlackLagoon

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Summary:

It's 1989. It's summer. Richie Tozier is thirteen. His best friend is Eddie Kaspbrak. Richie knows there's something wrong in Derry, Maine. It's 1989-

Ah, But They Might Be

Author's Note:

Sorry this took so long to post, but I've really been trying to get this story right. I'm very excited to finally be sharing it, and since the rest of this already has an outline it shouldn't take me much longer to update. This is an AU I've been drafting for like three months, and I'm planning on writing two other fics connected to it, so yes, I'm very excited. Big thanks to my beta readers, I'm literally all over the place writing this so to have someone steering me in more coherent directions is very helpful. Hope you all enjoy!!

The Earth goes around the Sun. There are 365 days in a year. It's 1989. It's the beginning of summer break. Richie Tozier is thirteen. His best friend is Eddie Kaspbrak. And Richie knows there's something wrong in Derry, Maine.

He just can't seem to figure out what. It *might* have to do with the start of his epic, mind blowing, fantastic summer plans being unanimously stepped on by his now, ex-friends.

"Listen Bill- just ditch babysitting tonight, you're the only one of us who actually gets paid around here, and there's no way I'm going to beat my high score on Street Fighter with two quarters," Richie begs, walking backwards down the busy school hallway.

"It's probably cuz you're shit at it," Eddie says mildly, and Richie instinctively pinches his cheek. Said cheek pinching is followed by an extreme amount of obscenities as Richie pushes open the schools front doors to freedom.

"My dad gives me allowance," Stan says peaceably, and Richie turns before he takes a step out to glare at him.

"It doesn't count when you won't let me borrow any." Stan just shrugs, but he's smiling like he got a good one over Richie, which

yes, technically he has, but he's still being an asshole. Richie huffs indignantly, shoving past other eager home bound students until he's parked far enough from the chaos to properly bitch. Eddie follows quickly. He's small enough to shift through the crowd no problem, throwing out his tiny little elbows when anyone even tries to get too close. Stan and Bill however don't seem to have a care in the world, and leisurely make their way to the outskirts of Derry's Junior high parking lot.

"Listen- guys I'm desperate- you know I'd ask your mom for money Eddie, but I don't believe in cash for sex," Richie tries to sell it, all big doe eyes and everything, but he knows his lips are curving up into a grin before Eddie can even get out his first swear.

"You know what dick head, I have like, fifty dollars saved up, guess who's not fucking seeing any of that now," Eddie snaps affronted, gripping his backpack straps like he's pretending they're Richie. Which he probably is, in all likelihoods.

"You mean the wad of fives in your sock drawer?"

"How the fuck did you-?"

"I only borrowed like 10 bucks one time."

"You stole- *you stole* ten bucks from me asshole."

"I'm sorry Rich, b-but my parents would k-kill me if I ditched. Anyway t-their letting me sst-tay up later than Georgie to watch that rerun of N-n-nightmare on Elms Street," Bill interrupts, and there's a gleam in his eye left by the idea of watching an R-rated film without parents nearby. Richie know he's lost already.

"Then what am I supposed to do?" Richie asks, his gaze flitting from friend to friend, each of whom look to him with un-pitying expressions.

"Y-you could get a job," Bill says with a shrug, and Richie sends him a sharp look, magnified tenfold by his glasses. Bill looks back unperturbed.

Richie gives in with as dramatic a sigh as he can.

"Where the *fuck* am I supposed to get a job in this town anyhow huh?" Richie asks, pleading almost, because really, they've made him stoop to this level now, the least they can do is offer up options.

"I think an even better question is who's going to hire you," Stan says with a smirk, and then he's bumping Bill's shoulder and waving to Eddie and making his way back through the dispersing crowd to get to his bike. Stan is definitely in consideration for Richie's top ten least liked people list.

Richie watches Stan's traitorous back disappear around the bend of the school, and then abruptly turns back to his real, true friends.

"Bill- do you think your parents would pay me in quarters to mow your lawn?"

"I g-get allowance for mowing the l-lawn," Bill says, alarm clear on his face at losing his one other money making tactic, and takes a deductive step back. "L-Listen, Georgie's b-bus will be g-getting home soon I have to-" and then he's off like a shot.

And then there were two.

"The drug store is looking for a stock boy," Eddie mutters, adjusting his backpack strap unconsciously. Richie lets out a soft sigh, then lightly taps Eddie's arm with his fist.

"Thanks Eds."

"*Don't* call me that dude- just- maybe we'll figure something out at the Barrens tomorrow Rich," Eddie says, and his mouth turns down at the corners just a bit, before he's speed walking to his bike, and leaving Richie with only a trash can for company.

"Trashmouth with the trash I guess," Richie mumbles nonsensically. He stands there a moment, looking at the black rim of the trashcan feeling like he's missed something. Like he definitely shouldn't just be standing here, there should be-

This summer's gonna be a hurt train for you and your faggot friends.

Richie whips his head around, eyes scanning the parking lot for a shiny blue Pontiac Firebird. There is panic swelling in his chest, but-but there's no one, and no familiar car lurking.

And then it's gone, whatever strange feeling hanging in the back of Richie's mind leaves as soon as he sees the coast is clear.

Richie hikes his backpack up a little higher on his shoulders, and goes to grab his bike. He begins to consider his job options.

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"Okay- I could start my own lawn mowing service," Richie says aloud, squinting down at his crumpled list of *Totally Great Jobs*, and trying to keep the afternoon sun out of his eyes. They did all manage to make it to the Barrens, Stan after Synagogue, Eddie through several well versed lies, and Bill with Georgie in tow. But still they made it, and thankfully for Richie, it's a completely free pastime to swim and lounge on the sun baked rocks.

"No way, you'd get through two yards and call it quits. You wouldn't be able to build up a good clientele," Eddie counters, eyeing the quarry water warily from his perch on the uppermost rocks.

"Oh, is Dr. K a businessman now?" Richie croons, tilting his head up to get a better look at Eddie's no doubt pouting expression.

"It's literally just basic consumer knowledge Richie," Eddie grumbles throwing out his hands in exasperation, and Richie rolls his eyes.

"Okay *fine*- ix nay on the lawn mowing. How about the Aladdin?" Richie sighs, before grabbing his pencil and crossing off *Lawn mowing*.

"What *about* the Aladdin?" Stan asks, turning away from his vigorous sunscreen rubbing to look at Richie critically.

“Like- movie theater jobs- tickets and popcorn handling,” Richie says, waving his list around like it would at all help his mental flow. Stan looks at the list, and then goes back to his sunscreen application.

“Considering you started out by calling them movie theater jobs is probably not a good sign,” Stan says, and Richie drops his head into his hands with a groan.

“What about an ice cream truck driver?” Georgie asks, finally climbing out from the water where he and Bill had been playing.

“He doesn’t have have a l-license,” Bill says, following shortly behind, flopping onto a flat rock plateau wearily. Georgie is an absolute wild child, which Richie knows from a few unfortunate games of tag gone awry.

“Assistant to the assistant librarian?” Richie asks, and the rest of the boys simply look at him like he’s suggested running off to live with the circus. The circus however, is honestly starting to look like an okay option.

“It’s a *library* Richie,” Stan replies with a frown, like the very idea of *Richie* and *Library* together could end the world. Richie flips him off, ignoring the slight hiss of *Georgie* from Bill.

“*Jesus*- alright stock boy at the Keene’s drug store,” Richie says, crumpling up his list to throw at Stan.

“I’d s-say it’s your best bet Rich,” Bill says, rolling over onto his stomach to prop his head on his crossed arms.

“Keene’s taste in employees is rock bottom, you’ll get the job,” Stan says, finally closing his sunscreen bottle with a little *click* .

“Fuck you very much too Stan the Man,” Richie groans, and Bill throws a pebble at him for dropping the F-bomb.

Richie is out of options, he knows he is, and while he watches Stan jump into the water, Bill and Georgie following soon after with renewed energy, he tries to go over the pros and cons. Days he could be spending outside in the sun and fresh air, would instead be wasted by stocking shelves with medications. The Capitol theater however,

stays open late, so even if his *days* were wasted, he'd have the money to spend glorious late afternoons playing every game in the arcade.

Richie has never really considered himself a materialistic person, but in this case, money wins. While the idea of spending half of his days stuck inside with shitty fluorescent lights and carpets smelling slightly of mildew is less than appealing, spending his summer without cash is even worse.

"Listen- I'm not getting in unless you do- at least if I get influenza from like inhaling lake muck you'll get it too," Eddie interrupts Richie's thoughts, his voice piercing, but in a good way. A familiar way.

With a grin that would alert any authority figure that trouble was afoot, Richie grabs Eddie's arm and stands in one fluid motion. Then he takes off for the water.

Eddie curses him out an entire ten minutes for being forcefully dunked in the quarry before Bill splashes them both for being horrible role models. It escalates to a full on splash war in seconds, all grievances quickly forgotten.

It's not as horrible a start to Richie's summer as he'd thought.

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Richie isn't sure how it happens exactly. All he knows is, once he's settled on getting the stock boy job, the rest of his friends become weirdly supportive. Like- *creepily* supportive. Bill gives him speech tips he'd learned from his therapist for the interview (like Richie will really need to wow Keene with his articulation). Stan lets him borrow a tie that doesn't have any horrendously bright prints (he is only threatened once with death if he stains it). Even *Georgie* makes him a little good luck card.

And Eddie- well Eddie figures out the rest of his '*look*' .

"It's like you've never brushed your hair once! How is that possible? It looks so smooth, why did the brush get *stuck* ?!" Eddie yells, which ouch, he's right next to Richie's ear, and Eddie is already the loudest person on Earth.

"If you just- I have *thick* hair- stop pulling it *Jesus* !" Richie yells back, hands flying up in an effort to protect what hair he has left now that Eddie has decided to pull it all out.

"That's bullshit- how can hair be *thicker* ?" Eddie says pulling at the brush again, with Richie wriggling from his seat on the toilet lid, still in *very* genuine pain.

"It's not- what does that even mean, *it's genetics*! Let go of the brush Eddie!" Richie yelps, finally grabbing the base of the brush from Eddie's hands and maneuvering it out of the rats nest it had caught on. Richie places it with a loud thunk in the basin of his bathroom sink, and rubs dully at his scalp.

"Jesus Spageds- Keene is gonna ask me like two fuckin questions, and they'll be *can you pick things up?* And *can you put things back down?* Because that's all that stock boys do."

"I just- sorry," Eddie shrugs his mouth quirking down and then up at the side like he's not sure what to do with it.

"Dude, it's fine, I just don't get why you and the others are so obsessed with me getting this job. If I didn't know you guys loved me so much I'd say your trying to get me out of the way," Richie says jokingly, but he must let a little too much honesty slip in, because Eddie's expression immediately shifts to worry.

"It's not that- it's just- we all wish *we* could get jobs. It's like the first grown up thing any of us have done, and Stan can't because he has his dad to worry about, and Bill has Georgie, and my mom would just never let me but it's- cool that *you can* , I guess," Eddie stumbles over his last few words, voice going so soft, if Richie weren't great at Eddie interpreting, he would have missed it entirely.

"Well- if that's the case, then I guess it is pretty cool. Ya know- how much more of a *man* I am than the rest of you," Richie says, slanting



his eyes to the side to watch Eddie's expression shift from endearingly worried, to nuclear annoyance. Only Eddie could do nuclear annoyance and still look cute.

"I told you that in confidence asshole, see if I try to make you feel better anytime soon, huh? Jesus, ya know, I could be- I could be like playing Street Fighter without you right now, but I'm brushing your stupid mop so you look presentable for your possible future employer!"

"Yeah, yeah- now, what makeup do you think will make my eyes stand out?"

It's an intricate, but simple game they play. Richie pushes, and Eddie pushes back. A teeter totter of equal force that sends them flying up and down, at rollercoaster, stomach turning speeds. Richie lives for every second of it.

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Richie gets the job. He's not really sure how, doesn't exactly remember the details of his interview. But it's over and he's got it. Which- *cool* .

He earns \$2 an hour, and even Richie knows that's far, *far* below the minimum wage, but he's 13 and legally shouldn't be working yet, so he lets it slide. He gets ten bucks to spend at the arcade each day, which equals 40 quarters, which equals 20 play throughs at the arcade. It's good enough for him.

Really, his only real job is to not die of boredom. Well *that* , and saving up the energy to organize shelves of seemingly Latin based product names.

He hasn't seen hide nor tail of Greta so far, which is good. Apparently Keene's let her off the hook this summer, either that or she's very good at avoiding annoying middle schoolers. But the lack of Bitchzilla also seems to mean a lack of anyone else. It's like a fucking

ghost town most days, besides the ever frequent visits from Eddie under the impressively easy guise of buying more medications for his mother.

"I swear to God, it's like no one has any medical problems. I don't think I've seen one person in here today. Ever heard of Hay fever Derry?" Richie complains, leaning against the hard metal of the shelf he was just stocking. Eddie shrugs, continuing to play with the label maker Richie had grudgingly let him use.

"Uh Huh- so, how are you non working boys doing without me? Dying of boredom I'm sure," Richie asks, mainly to take Eddie's attention away from the label maker privileges he's abusing.

"You're not half wrong," Eddie grumbles, placing the label maker down to look at him, and Richie's eyebrows shoot up.

"What- Big Bill and Stan the Man are actually *missing* me?"

"What? No- it's just- I feel like I'm not seeing any of you. Stan's dad has really gotten on his case about his Bar Mitzvah reading or something like that, and Bill is spending all his time babysitting Georgie. I guess, *I* miss everyone a little," Eddie mumbles the last bit, and Richie would normally make a joke, but- what the hell, he can at least try and make Eddie feel better.

"Well- what if we just- plan sometime to get together? A night out at the barrens with the boys?" Richie says with a nonchalant shrug, and Eddie looks at him for a moment, then leans against the shelf to consider it thoughtfully.

"Stan's going to complain non-stop about the poison ivy," Eddie finally replies, and Richie laughs out loud.

"That he will, my good fellow, that he will," Richie says, using his most posh British Voice. The corners of Eddie's mouth twitch up.

"I think that one's actually getting worse Rich."

"You wound me my good sir, I don't know *how* I will go on," Richie says leaning back against the shelf with a dramatic hand over his face. Eddie's facade breaks as he doubles over giggling.

"It's *horrible* !" Eddie says, still very much laughing, so Richie's not exactly bothered.

"So- do you actually need anything for your mom?" Richie finally asks once they've both calmed down.

"No- she stocked up at the beginning of the month. But I was wondering about- is Greta at the counter?" Eddie asks suddenly, peering up and over the shelving unit to the back of the store. Richie shrugs.

"Not since I last checked, pretty sure her smoke breaks are just- never ending," Richie sighs, and then moves to grab another box of unstocked products.

"She wasn't here last time- neither was Mr. Keene, I don't know how I'm supposed to pick up my new inhaler," Eddie mutters, kicking unconsciously at the matted grey green carpet.

"Didn't you like- just get a refill?"

"I- I don't really remember- *which* probably means it's been too long," Eddie says, and for a moment there's a look of uncertainty on his face, foggy and unclear. It's there and gone before Richie can really mention it.

"Well- I could check to see if they have it," Richie says, and suddenly that seems like the greatest idea ever.

"And then have you fired, no, *no* that's a bad idea," Eddie says, voice coming out in a rushed gasp.

"I'd literally just walk back and check- not like Keene is here to see me," Richie says, while walking backwards up to the counter, purposefully ignoring the way Eddie is hissing at him to come back.

Richie knows from the briefest of tours, that the prescription rack is just left of the counter. If Keene does his job right, the prescriptions are in alphabetical order by customers names. Finding Kasprak in the shelves is the easy part. The inhaler however-

"Jesus dude, is your mom planning on turning you into some sort of

medical mutant?” Richie calls out, and he can hear an indignant scoff from the other side of the counter.

“Just hurry up Richie!”

“Easier said than done,” Richie mutters, glancing warily at the rows of prescriptions. He starts filing through them, one by one, lots of pills, no inhaler. Richie isn’t trying to pry, he’s not a nosy person, but something is off.

“Hey- what’s glucose?” Richie calls out.

“It’s sugar dumbass! How do you have better grades than me?” Eddie snaps, and now he’s leaning over the counter looking down at Richie.

“Have you found it yet?” He asks, and Richie doesn’t know what to say. Why would Eddie’s prescriptions have sugar listed as one of the main ingredients?

“Do you know what it’s called? The prescription in your inhaler?” Richie asks, turning back to the rack, unease settling heavy in his stomach. Eddie doesn’t answer, just frowns and leans farther over the counter.

“It’s just- my inhaler,” Eddie says finally, quiet, like he knows something’s not right. Like Richie knows something’s not right.

Richie’s silent as he sorts through everything else, until finally he comes across the inhaler prescription. *Ventolin placebo metered dose inhaler* . Richie pulls it out, and studies it carefully. He doesn’t know what the words mean, but- they don’t feel right to him.

He stands slowly, and turns to Eddie who’s peering at him cautiously over the counter.

“Did you find it, give it over,” Eddie demands, hand reaching out, making a little grabby motion that normally Richie would respond to with *cute, cute, cute* but now just makes him feel anxious.

“Eddie- I’m not sure- have you read your prescriptions before?” Richie asks, ignoring the hand Eddie has put forth reaching for the inhaler’s prescription bag.

“Of course I- I mean *sure*- I don’t *remember* okay?” Eddie says, hand retreating and face going pink.

Richie looks at him for a long hard moment, before carefully handing over the packet, and Eddie takes it without looking him in the eyes.

They both stand there for a moment, thinking of sugar pills and placebos. Whatever they’re supposed to be.

“I- I have to go,” Eddie says suddenly, backing away quickly from the counter and past the shelves.

“Eds wait,” Richie calls out, and Eddie pauses at the door.

“ *Don’t*- just- I’ll see you later Rich,” Eddie says, and with his inhaler clasped close to his chest, he pulls open the front door, and Richie can just see him racing across the street before he’s out of view.

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It’s two weeks after Richie gets his job and a week after the placebo thing with Eddie, that the second most interesting thing happens at the drugstore.

He’s on his break, or what he assumes is his break because Keene never really *addressed* the appropriate time, when *it* happens. He’s leaned against the alley wall, wishing he had a cigarette because wouldn’t that be the coolest looking thing, when he hears a crash from the dumpsters a couple of yards away. Richie is immediately hyper aware of himself, because he’s heard Stan talk about drug deals in alleys before and how drug dealers carry pocket knives and how they will shiv you no questions asked if you’re where you’re not supposed to be.

Richie has no self preservation apparently because he finds himself taking several tentative steps forward, trying awkwardly to hide himself behind the dumpsters while also looking over them. Thankfully for Richie- it’s not drug dealers at the end of the alley.

Unfortunately, it's a lot worse

It's a kid. A vaguely familiar kid- Richie's pretty sure he was in his advanced English class, back row because it had been the only seat left available. Benjamin Harmon? *Hannigan* ? It started with an H, Richie knows, but that's not entirely the point because the kid is clutching his stomach and there's blood, and that really can't be fucking good.

"Holy shit, what happened to you?" are the first words out of Richie's mouth, because he's panicking, and there's a kid he barely knows bleeding out in an alley right now, while Richie is on his kind of maybe not break. Ben startles, righting himself and his bike, soft face creased with pain.

"Bike accident," Ben mumbles, and Richie is definitely worried now he's going to pass out. How much blood does it take for someone to pass out? An ounce? Two? *How much is an ounce?*

"Well fuck just- I work at the drug store- there are band aids and shit I could get-" Richie stumbles, and Ben looks at him warily, bloodied hands gripping his handle bars so tightly his knuckles are white. Richie remembers now that Ben probably recognizes him too. He probably also remembers the whoopee cushion he'd left on Ms. Madison's chair. And the dozen or so times he'd tried to get a discussion started on why Shakespeare was the best at writing dick jokes.

His confidence levels cannot be high.

"Okay- can I- leave my bike out here," Ben asks, and Richie has to take a moment before he realizes that's a yes to his offer.

"Yeah, yeah of course, just- there's fine," Richie babbles, already walking to open the back door of the pharmacy. Ben looks around, and carefully sets his bike down near the dumpsters.

Richie is worried that any second Keene or Greta will pop out out from wherever they've been hiding, just to see him sneaking in some half dead tween. But the shop stays blissfully silent as he leads Ben farther into the store, making sure to stick close in case he really does

pass out from blood loss.

He doesn't, thankfully.

Finally, Richie finds a discarded swivel chair in the corner of the back room and pulls it over for Ben to sit. So Ben sits, and there is still blood seeping through his shirt, an embarrassing looking graphic T, that Richie would totally make fun of if the kid wasn't dying.

"Hang on a minute I need to- call somebody," Richie says suddenly, once the staring back and forth at each other goes on too long, and Ben kind of just nods as Richie makes a dash for the wall phone near a locked medical cabinet.

He dials the one number besides his own home phone that he knows by heart. He hasn't spoken to Eddie in a week since the whole prescription thing. Okay, 6 days. 6 days, 15 hours and like 29 minutes. *But who's counting?*

It rings for a couple of seconds, a couple of seconds in which Richie can feel himself vibrating with nerves, because he needs Eddie to pick up, but then finally the line clicks.

"This is the Kaspbrak household, Eddie speaking." Richie lets out a sigh of relief as Eddie's voice reaches his ears.

"Yeah, Eds *hey* , I need you to bike over to the drug store like right now, there's a kid here who's got like- blood pouring out of him!"

There's only a minuscule pause before Eddie's polite phone answering voice changes to something more akin to what Richie's used to. Full of profanity and everything.

"Richie, if this is some fucking prank I'm-

"Why would I joke! The kids literally dying right in front of me!" Richie yelps, and Ben's eyes swivel to meet his, wide with surprise.

"It's not really *that* bad-" Ben tries to say from across the room, but Richie just waves a hand at him to shut it. There's some crashing noises on the other side of the line, and Richie almost wants to ask if Eddie is murdering someone over there.

“ *Eddie-?* ”

“I’ll be there in five minutes, just- get me a couple rolls of bandages, some medical tape, like a tub of Neosporin, some antiseptic wipes, pain meds too!” Eddie says, and then the phone clicks again and the line is dead. Richie sighs, placing the phone back on the hook, and looks over to Ben who is hunched feebly in his swivel chair. Richie goes to get the pain meds first.

The rest of Eddie’s needed supplies are easy enough to find, and not to brag but Richie has gotten pretty good at navigating the isles. The *tub* of Neosporin is an issue, but he’s sure Eddie can settle for the regular small tube shaped container instead.

“Uh- you’re not like- allergic to any medicines are you?” Richie asks, as he walks back around the counter to Ben, arms full of bandages and pill bottles. Richie’s only asking because Stan had told him about a guy who’d had an allergic reaction and died from something in a cold medicine.

Ben just shrugs, which isn’t the greatest of answers, but Richie tosses him the bottle of Baby aspirin anyway.

“So- how did you manage to ride a bike so bad?” Richie asks, leaning against the counter as Ben uncaps the aspirin. He shrugs noncommittally, but his ears have gone pink.

He mumbles something that Richie absolutely can not hear, and then swallows two pills dry. Richie stares at him for a moment, and there’s an awkward beat of silence. Or- the whole things awkward, and they just happen to be quiet.

“Were you- *speaking* just then dude?” Richie asks, leaning forward to make sure Ben hasn’t actually gone into some blood loss induced fugue state. Ben leans back in his swivel chair, away from Richie. His face is beet red now.

“I didn’t want to hit the turtle okay!” Ben blurts out.

“The- *turtle* ?” Richie repeats, eyebrows raised, and Ben nods his head, a little frantically if Richie’s being truthful.



"It was just- I thought I saw- I got distracted and there was a turtle on the road I hadn't seen, so I had to swerve, and I swerved too far and went down into a ravine," Ben finishes, then winces slightly at his own movement.

"Sounds titillating, make sure to come up with something cooler when Eddie gets here," Richie sighs, leaning back again. Ben eyes him for a moment, before a small smile creeps onto his face.

"What? Something on my face?" Richie asks, moving to swipe at his mouth but Ben quickly shakes his head.

"No I just- I remember where I know you from. Ms. Madison's class, front row. You're really smart," Ben says, and it's like- he's not even teasing Richie about it. Just being- *genuine* .

"Yeah, I'm a regular Doogie Howser. Smartest kid in town," Richie says rolling his eyes, but he knows his cheeks are flaming. Ben huffs a laugh, then winces again.

"I'm serious- you had a lot of interesting stuff to say in class. You were the first person to actually understand how iambic pentameter works," Ben says earnestly, and Richie just waves him off.

"Whatever, not like it was hard," Richie says with a shrug, but he can't help but let a smile creep into his face.

Suddenly there's a bang from the front of the store as Eddie bursts in. He's barely out of breath for someone who's *asthmatic* , but he's red in the face, and carrying the biggest bag of stuff Richie's ever seen. Both Ben and he peer over the counter as Eddie runs up to meet them.

"Alright, I grabbed as much as I could, have either of you touched the wound!" Eddie asks, dumping his bag on the counter and pushing through the little swing door. Ben looks to Richie in alarm, and Richie doesn't blame him.

"No Dr. K, we've left that to the professional," Richie quips, and Eddie rolls his eyes before crouching in front of Ben. He doesn't hesitate at the sight of blood, just peels up the shirt carefully eyes

glancing over the cut with steely eyes. It's no longer actively bleeding, but it still doesn't look pleasant.

"What did you even do?" Eddie snaps, dropping his hand from the shirt.

"I Uh-" Ben pauses and looks to Richie, who nods frantically from behind Eddie. "Tried to save a- cat from a tree- and then I- *fell*."

Eddie looks at Ben for a moment silently, then turns sharply to Richie as he lets out a choked laugh. He tries to turn into a cough halfway, but Eddie is already looking at him like he's crazy so he just motions to Ben.

"So, can you fix him?" Richie asks, lips wobbling in an effort not to laugh again, and Eddie merely sighs.

"Yeah I- yeah, do you have the bandages?" Eddie asks warily, running an agitated hand through his hair, as he looks back to Ben.

"Sure thing Dr. K," Richie says with a grin, and as Eddie shuffles through the piles of band aids, wet wipes, and bandage rolls, Richie winks at Ben. He receives a sheepish smile in return.

Eddie is quiet as he cleans around the gash, which in all seriousness isn't that bad once all the blood is out of the way. Not deep enough to cause any lasting damage, besides a pale scar once it's healed. Richie can feel his panic slowly subsides as he watches Eddie work, and Ben barely winces once at the heavily applied Neosporin.

He finishes quickly, hands moving over the bandages one last time checking to see if the medical is holding. He's got this furrow in his brow that Richie can't help but think is- well it's cute. And then Eddie is looking up at him, and it's suddenly- Richie can feel his face burning, so he opens his mouth and lets words pour out.

"Alrighty Dr. K, is he chip-chip and cheerio now?"

"The British guy is definitely getting worse I think," Eddie says with a sweet looking smile, and Richie can't actually form words anymore.

"How long should I keep these on?" Ben asks suddenly as he stands

shakily, and Eddie quickly turns his attention away from Richie. Thank god for Ben.

Richie picks up the rest of Eddie's supplies, and then ushers them back out to the alleyway entrance letting them talk between themselves, as he tries very hard to get his heart rate to *chill out* for like one second. Eddie, *thankfully*, doesn't seem aware of anything but making sure Ben doesn't fuck up all his work.

"And do not- *do not* put new bandages on before you've disinfected the wound again," Eddie finishes with hard look in Ben's direction, and he nods his head frantically in understanding.

"Okay, I think the man gets the point Eds, I'll see ya around Ben," Richie says dodging the elbow Eddie swings his way, and Ben pauses a moment eyes wide in surprise.

"Ya- yeah, see you too Richie," Ben stumbles, grinning slightly as he picks up his bike. He's still smiling as he mounts his bike and waves to them. And then he's gone, and Richie and Eddie are alone in the alley.

Richie scuff the ground with his shoe, hands deep in his pockets as Eddie messes with the kickstand on his bike.

"Thanks for coming, by the way," Richie says suddenly, and Eddie looks to him cheeks flushed pink.

"O-of course I came, you called Rich."

"Yeah I know but- I just thought-" Richie shrugs his shoulders, moving his hand in a vague circling motion. Eddie seems to catch on his meaning anyway. He's quiet for a moment, hands gripping the handle bars tight. Like a lifeline.

"She was lying to me- about my medicine."

"Your- mom?" Richie asks quietly, and Eddie's lips purse, eyes still down cast. Richie isn't sure he's going to get an answer until Eddie lets out a harsh sounding sigh and looks up at him.

"Placebos are uh- I looked it up in our Dictionary- they're fakes. I'm

not sick, I've never been sick like she said," Eddie says, and his eyes are bright, slightly red around the edges, and Richie realizes he's crying. He's not sure what to do with that information.

"Well... anyone with eyes could have told you that," Richie says softly, and Eddie lets out a little laugh, but his voice cracks a bit.

"I should have come sooner- I was just-" Eddie wipes at his eyes with the palm of his hand, and Richie shakes his head vigorously.

"I get it Eds," and because they're alone, and Eddie is crying when Eddie shouldn't ever cry, Richie places his hand carefully over the other boys still gripping the handle bars of the bike. They stand there, close and quiet for a moment, not thinking about what this means, not really, just knowing they have each other.

And then the moment ends, as all moments do, and Eddie grinning cheekily at him, looking up at him through long curling lashes.

"I'll see you at the Arcade tonight- Stan says he's planning on beating your score on Street Fighter."

"As if, he doesn't have the coordination to beat my skills," Richie scoffs with a grin, and Eddie rolls his eyes.

"Bye Rich," Eddie sighs, but he's smiling, and as he starts pedaling away darting down the sidewalk at an insane speed, it dawns on Richie that Eddie hadn't protested being called Eds this time.